

IIMA Anthology 2003-2021, volume 8

# Authors R-W

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## GENERAL PREFACE TO THE IIMA ANTHOLOGY

The IIMA Anthology collects some of the most unique and important contributions to International Improvised Music Archive. IIMA is an internet archive founded 2003 by Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen, Denmark. The present Anthology was not meant to replace the site which hosts a number of other contributions and links, but to act as a signpost and an extra reserve for preservation of some rare works. The site features more authors and possibly more by the individual authors than included here, so I can warmly recommended to find it by internet search.

The motivation behind IIMA was to make both a number of instructional scores / graphic scores / open compositions / compositions for improvisors /etc. easily available - and some theoretical texts, both as a supplement to what is available elsewhere.

*For navigating:* as a starting-point, disregard the hypertexts (although a few might work). Scroll and use the index table. Contents were pasted from the individual HTML pages in the web version or recreated from archived files. Do not hesitate to use the standard search function within the document, in order to move from the index section to the item in question – or to browse for names, etc. This is possible to a large extent because much of the content (not all, though) is rendered in text, not graphics format. Care has been taken to make everything well accessible and readable, but please observe peculiarities such as the above ones.

None of my own creative and research output is included here apart from some composer portraits and translation work (I was born 1951 in DK) but I suppose it will be available through internet search.

All works appeared in IIMA by permission.

Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen

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# INTERNATIONAL IMPROVISED MUSIC ARCHIVE - HENRIK EHLAND RASMUSSEN (DK, b.1961)

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Composer, improviser, pianist, music therapist. [Homepage](#)

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[Composition: 3 notes \(2010\)](#) for ensemble of melody instruments ad libitum.

[Composition: Cycle \(1998\)](#) for an ensemble of melody instruments ad libitum.

## Three individual notes !

Ensemble of melody instruments ad lib.

Every member of the group chooses each 3 specific notes. Each player can only use these 3 notes, - but many times and in many ways. Make sure you make appropriate individual pauses.

- Every use of your notes must be short sounds (max. 1 sec.). Play alternatingly notes relatively loudly and very faintly. You decide on your own whether you start with ppp or f. Play your notes as many times as needed.

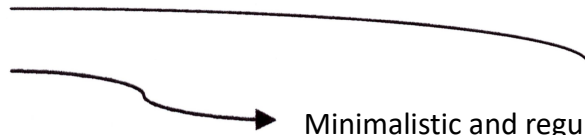
1 – 3 min.



Tutti medium break

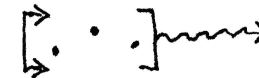
Then treat each note in many different ways, one by one – using repetitions, different dynamics, different attacks, different timbres....Play one note in many ways before treating the next one.

- Wait until everyone has had the time needed to finish all the notes – *duration ad lib.*

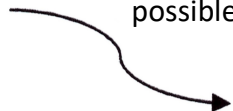


Use the break that gradually occurs to prepare the next section –

Minimalistic and regular repetitions of your individual notes – *approx. 3 min.*



– Continue the minimalistic pattern, and try to meet the others on the dynamic level, moving towards softest possible playing of the notes together – then raise gradually to the loudest and most beautiful level of sound.



Repeat this pattern of dynamic changes, and always follow each other – *approx. 2 min.*  
Everybody must stop exactly at the same time.

Henrik E. Rasmussen 2009

# Cycle

for ensemble of melody instruments ad libitum

Play the cycle shown below individually. The notes in the beginning serve only as a rhythmic indication and may contain several tones or chords. No attacks should be played simultaneously with the other musicians. However, strive to let the statements of the rhythmic motif alternate regularly.

A: The indicated rhythm occurs often  
(2-4 min.)

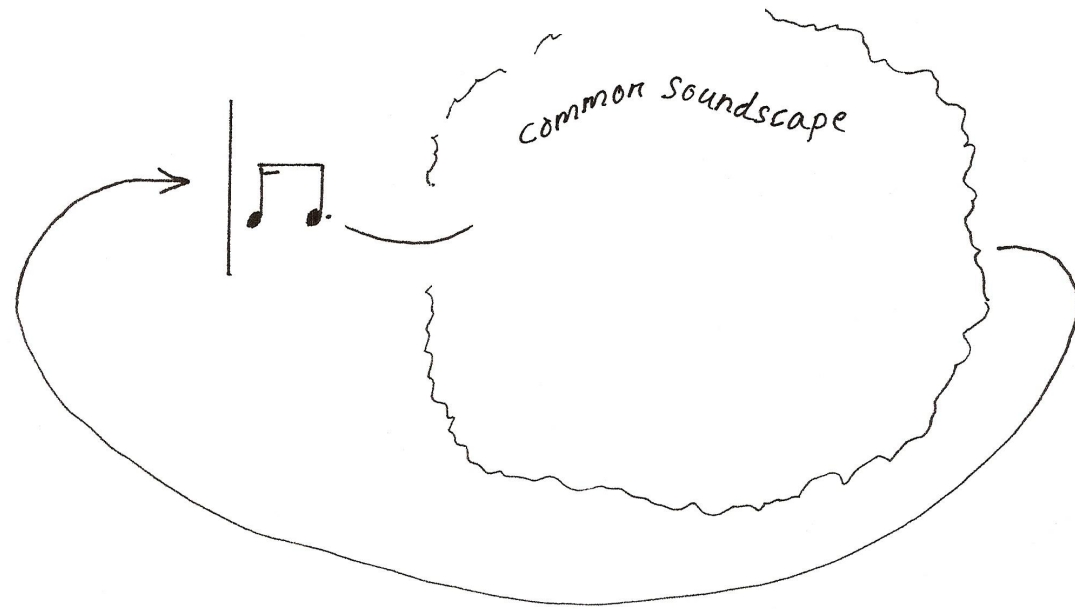
- G.P. / short break -

B: The indicated rhythm occurs more seldom  
(2-4 min.)

- G.P. / short break -

C: The indicated rhythm ad lib.

The piece stops when the right intensity has been arrived at.



Henrik E. Rasmussen  
1998

## **INTERNATIONAL IMPROVISED MUSIC ARCHIVE - MATTHIAS SCHWABE (D, b.1958)**

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Improvisor, teacher, founder of exploratorium berlin 2004.

[Improvisation Exercises for Large Groups \(English\).](#)

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# IMPROVISATION EXERCISES FOR LARGE GROUPS

by Matthias Schwabe

*This text is an excerpt from the article "Lob der autonomen Grossgruppe" (Homage to the autonomous large group), printed in Improfil 81, December 2018, p. 18-22. Translated from German by Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen.*

One of my most important professional activities is to work with music amateurs. Of course, results cannot be compared to those of professional musicians. But I have experienced that unexperienced players prefer the large group to the small one. There, they only have to contribute a little to the overall music, however, it may be well-proportioned. This is much more consistent with their self-image than would be, for instance, to carry one third of the musical responsibility in a trio. (...)

Below are, as models, five playing-rules (...) They have proven useful with groups of 8 to 25 persons which were in many cases absolute amateurs (social pedagogues and others), in other cases clearly music professionals, but unexperienced in improvisation (music students), or backgrounds were totally mixed. (...)

## **SOUND LEVEL - A LISTENING GAME.**

One person starts with a sound idea, which should for the moment have a soft volume, that is, maximum mp. Proceeding in a circle, the other players join one by one. Their sound ideas should be possibly different from those of the others, but at the same time equally perceptible. This latter quality depends not only on the volume, but also on density of impulses, timbre, frequency and much more. The aim is that no sound appears neither in background nor foreground, but that they all have the same "weight". Wenn everybody is playing, allow two minutes in order to modify one's own sound and also to check whether everybody else are to be equally heard. Share experiences and perceptions in a discussion. Usually it will appear that judgements are very different according to the spatial position.

Therefore it will be a good idea to play one more variant in which one person stands in the middle and provides feedback. This is done by making hand-signs, when individual sounding ideas are coming into foreground or background, compared to the others. Having finally reached a balanced overall sound, it should be jointly listened to for some time.

This is a game for perceiving the whole group. I utilise it in order quasi to "tune" the instrument group. How am I to play in order to be exactly on the same "weight"-level? It focuses the players' attention on listening to the overall sound and to perceive their position within it. And it provides valuable feedback about the way in which one's own sound is propagated and perceived by others. Recommended both as an introduction for new groups and as a warm-up for playing in unfamiliar spaces.

## **GARDEN OF SOUNDS: MULTISOUND SCENES SHIFTING IN SLOW MOTION.**



Players spread around the room in such a way as to fill it evenly, so to speak as sounding plants in an imaginary garden. One person walks through the room as a "gardener" having the task of creating a musical process. This is done by touching individual plants, meaning to start and stop the sound. Players act with closed eyes, as far as instruments allow. When they are prompted to start, they invent a static or repetitive sounding idea which suits the already existing sounding ideas and stick to this until prompted to stop. When they are started again, they can invent a new idea which of course also should be "appropriate", or, if they need to, they can repeat the old one. The "gardener" cannot influence what the "plants" are playing. He or she can solely decide about starts and stops, but responsibility for what is played resides entirely with the "plants". So the task of the gardener consists just in changing the mix of the overall sound and the group size, which may be done by reacting to the music.

The piece starts and ends with silence.

Discussing it afterwards, experiences are shared, and when needed, other gardeners may take over. To end, I recommend to play a version without a gardener. In this case, everybody is responsible for own starts and stops. It may be an idea in very large groups to agree that every plant has a maximum of three playing periods.

In this game, the composition of different mixes of sounds presents itself very gradually, so to speak in slow motion. One thing resulting in the slow character is that all players are to hang on to their sound, in order that the others can reliably modify their sound and react accordingly. Another reason for the slow character is that the gardener must walk around in the room in order to make prompts. While this takes place, players who are of course also listeners, will have much time to listen.

Conducting does explicitly not take place by means of visual signs, in order that players are not distracted from listening (as much as possible with closed eyes). It is also important to note the division of responsibilities: the gardener decides about when, the plants about the what.

## **"LANDSCAPES" AS METAPHOR FOR CONNECTING UNITY AND DIVERSITY**

How can we perceive complex, heterogeneous sound mixtures as unities? And how can we create heterogeneous structures which form a meaningful "unity" in spite of individual components being diverse? Listening to such structures, associations of landscapes frequently arise, because these are in themselves complex, but still they possess a character which ties all the details together. This is the starting-point for the following playing rule:

The group depicts collectively a landscape. This should be one which does not have sounds itself. Goal is not to illustrate natural sounds, rather, the non-sounding perceptions and also musical emotional states should inspire the musical fantasy. As a preparation it is helpful to collect characteristics of the chosen landscape. In case of a desert this could be: (shimmering) heat, glaring light, spaciousness, silence (!), dryness, soft forms, monotony, lack of movement, existential danger and much more. Players have some minutes to find corresponding sounds. Then a common landscape should arise having a duration of felt 2 to 3 minutes. It is essential to listen to each other and to integrate one's own sounding idea into the group sound. In doing so, parameter such as dynamics, frequency of onsets, also timbre and perhaps pitch/register play a role. In case there are more than 20 players I would

divide the group and have two versions played.

When the first attempt was clear - it is in most cases very convincing - more should follow. To this end, a list of possible landscapes should be made that do not have inherent sounds (deep sea, North Pole, abandoned city, moon landscape, high mountains, tundra, etc). Players form sub-groups of 4 to 8 persons.

It may be a good idea to make this a guessing game, letting the listeners guess which landscape has been played. That has the advantage of being an occasion to describe in words what was heard. Talking about music is an important topic, even though it is not the main point of this contribution.

In no way the aim of this piece is to learn programme music. Rather, the landscapes are metaphors for musical structures. They connect diversity of the details with unity of the overall character. This idea may be transferred into "absolute music" by the following variants.

Variant 1: One person invents a characteristic sound to signify one of the listed landscapes, but one which is unknown to everyone else. The other players attempt to understand which landscape was meant (which musical character) and supplement it with their own suitable sounds. Only as many players should enter as necessary in order to create a structure which makes a "complete" appearance. After this, those who listened share their opinions as to whether the sounds really did associate into ONE music, or whether they appeared singled out one by one with no connection. One may also reveal which landscapes different persons thought about, but this is not important.

Variant 2: One person invents a characteristic sound, without thinking of a landscape. The other players supplement with suitable sounds. These should be absolutely diverse, but should also unite into ONE music, one character, one atmosphere or anything that feels integrated. Here it also applies that only as many players should enter as are necessary to create a structure which feels right. The other players then share their opinion as to whether this was achieved.

To create coherent structures, but also developing the feeling for how many or how few persons are necessary to make a structure "right" - this is the aim of these playing rules. A fine continuation to be just shortly suggested here, is to transform musically a journey. Nota bene, without any landscapes named in concrete terms, rather as a continuous mutation process in which new elements surface and old ones disappear. In this way, a largely free improvisation is being created in which the metaphor of a journey is helpful in order to direct attention both to the combination of sounds (in which imaginary landscape are we presently?), and also to the musical process (where are we heading to and in which tempo?). It is an important experience that everybody does not have to play, but only as much as is exactly necessary in the situation.

## **CHANGE OF LINE-UP**

1. Preparatory exercise: while sitting in a circle the group plays a piece with the cast moving around the circle, always 2 - 3 people playing. That is: players 1 and 2 begin, 3 joins in and a trio comes into being. Some time after, 1 stops playing so that there is only a duo left, in turn

4 joins in (trio), 2 stops (duo) etc. This should not be a sequence of short duos and trios, rather a continuous musical process wandering through the circle.

2. Change of players in a circle: Basic idea is the same as before - the group plays a continuous piece, players change through passing on their turns in the circle. But this time, the number of players is (almost) open. The only limitation being that at least one person must play and one person must listen (else the sequence becomes unclear). For a group of 10 players, this means: 9 persons may play, but the group may also reduce itself down to solo. Important: start and stop of playing is solely permitted one after another in the circle, and only in the direction agreed on. So I can only stop when the player before me has stopped, and I can only start after the player before me has started. This may sometimes lead to confusion, but it is important. This is to make it evident and sensually tangible how important it is to stop again and again in this process and to hand over the game to the others. The challenge for the players is now to establish a musical process in which totally different sizes of constellations occur, from solo to maximum, and in which a fast change is possible as well. This could for instance happen when a group of neighbouring players stop or start immediately one after another. Besides, here is a slightly wicked tip: people who cannot make pauses are outing themselves because the process is brought to a stand-still – for a number of hardcore perpetual players this can be an important experience.

3. Free change of players: the ensemble should conclude with at least one common improvisation in which, as the only agreement, change of constellation sizes are essential. In contrast to before, also phases with tutti and general pauses are allowed here.

The journey version of “Landscapes” and the “Change of Line-Up” complement each other. While in the Journey the “right measure” is to determine the size of the group, in Change of Line-Up, experimentation with various sizes of the ensemble and explicitly playing with their changes should be in the foreground. This requires players to be very attentive and react very fast, whereas the “Journey” can also be realised in a quiet and even meditative atmosphere (it does not have to, though). Essential to both playing rules is the focused dealing with different combinations of players.

### 3D

The basic idea of 3D is to add one more dimension, the depth of the musical space, to the two dimensions of sounding together (vertically) and process in time (horizontally) by means of simultaneous (!) different dynamics. That means that the players do not always have the same volume as the others, but they consciously choose between background, foreground and any position in between. It is, however, essential that everyone can be heard. Consequently, as a player I must ask myself: How can I put a musical idea into the foreground in such a way that all other loudness levels are nevertheless hearable – maybe not all the time, but anyway every now and then? And from the other side: how can I put my background idea forward in such a way that it is still perceptible?

As a preparatory exercise the group builds a few structures and discusses how they worked. This may succeed even better when not everybody is playing and some people act as

audience and make a report afterwards. This is followed by improvisations using the 3D principle. Here as well, critical listeners (or recordings) can be of help.

Special challenge for tough “cases”: hardcore loud-players are to investigate the possibilities of playing in the background, and persistently shy background-players to try out ideas for the foreground.

Autonomous playing in the large group can be learned! And even more: when playing in the large group it becomes evident which qualities improvisation requires in order to be convincing. The exercises arising from this work are important tools for any kind of improvising, regardless whether the level is an amateur or a professional one.

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## **INTERNATIONAL IMPROVISED MUSIC ARCHIVE - PETER STERK (NL, b. 1957)**

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Composer, improviser and visual artist.

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# Biomass

*Music inspired by how plants spread through seeding*

Someone begins by playing a short musical idea.

Other players, after a brief delay, approximately reproduce one or more times what they have heard.

Once a player has done this, he selects a musical idea from what he is hearing at that moment, and reproduces this one or more times after a brief delay.

And so on.

*Gradually accidental mutations of the first idea will arise.*

A player may introduce a new and contrasting idea.  
This can also be done to restart the process when things get stuck.

Composer who also appeared as a musician in his own intuitive music.

ARTICLE:

[Questions and Answers on Intuitive Music](#) Transscript from a lecture session in London, 1972.

[Hugh Davies: Stockhausen's Intuitive Music](#)

Hugh Davies (GB, 1943-2005) was a composer, improvisor, pioneer for electronic music and self-built instruments.

*See also: the article by Kohl, Jrome in From the Seven Days in Vol. 4*

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## Questions and answers on Intuitive Music

*This discussion took place during the lecture Live Electronic and Intuitive Music given on November 15th 1971 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. The lecture with discussion was filmed by Allied Artists, London, and was transcribed from the film. The film is available on DVD from Stockhausen-Verlag as Stockhausen Films no.15.*

*This text has been published in the booklet of CD 14 AUS DEN SIEBEN TAGEN ([www.stockhausenCDs.com](http://www.stockhausenCDs.com)). A German translation appeared as "Fragen und Antworten zur intuitiven Musik", Texte IV Köln (DuMont), 1978, p. 130-144. © Stockhausen-Stiftung für Musik, Kürten, Germany ([www.karlheinzstockhausen.org](http://www.karlheinzstockhausen.org)).*

...

*Preceding the discussion, Stockhausen had played a tape recording of ES and after the discussion played a recording of AUFWÄRTS.*

*Stockhausen:* That was IT. As I said before, I call this music Intuitive Music, because with a text like the one for IT, one should exclude all the possible systems which are usually used for any kind of improvisation if one understands the term "improvisation" in the way it has always been used. I therefore prefer the term Intuitive Music. We shall see how Intuitive Music is going to develop in the future. Does anyone have a question?

*Question:* How can you say that when you stop thinking, the mind is open to higher centres? Aren't you doing what the surrealists did with automatic painting in the 1920's? They said that if one stops thinking, one opens the mind to the subconscious to the unconscious, and you are saying you open yourself to higher centres. Is this because the surrealists were under the influence of psycho-analysis and you are under the influence of Eastern philosophy?

*Stockhausen:* I only know from personal experience that Intuitive Music should if possible have nothing to do with psychology, which means nothing to do with the subconscious and unconscious. Rather, the musicians must be influenced by the supra-conscious (we can tell from the results that they certainly are), by something which enters into them. There is certainly nothing in the entire history of music, and nothing in that which we have ever done before that even slightly resembles the results which have come out of these texts. Thus, it must be that which we call the supra-conscious, and not the subconscious or unconscious.

*Question:* You said there were similarities between different interpretations.

*Stockhausen:* Yes, it is interesting.

*Question:* Could you say a few words about the similarities?

*Stockhausen:* In IT, for example, all the different versions which we have played start with very fragmentary short actions and sounds. Then, gradually a longer sound comes into being here and there, and as soon as someone starts, his predecessor immediately stops, so that the sounds cut



each other off. In all versions the superimposition of sustained sounds then increases. So, a musician plays something, then another one starts playing a sound or a certain sound pattern, and despite this, the other one can continue to play. Then it goes very quickly. In all the versions I have heard, there is never a slow transition: all of a sudden a situation is reached in which all players are obviously fascinated by something that is in the air. They are completely absorbed by the sound and act instantly without thinking I mean completely spontaneous action and thus very dense structures come into being which are maintained for some time, until there is a moment when one of the musicians plays a sound which is outside of the context. And then, abruptly there are long silences: the musicians try to carry on with what they were playing before, but it does not work.

I could now give you a description of that which is strictly connected with the development of organisms which develop, in no matter which region higher or lower, and one could go even further and say very distinct things about the layer- and register-changes.

*Question:* Were there ever any performances which in your view were failures?

*Stockhausen:* Do you mean, in which we couldn't play at all?

*Question:* No, in which something was played which to your musicians' creative sense seemed to be rubbish? Or is there such a thing as rubbish?

*Stockhausen:* Absolutely. The first sign of rubbish is the emergence of clichés: when pre-formed material comes out; when it sounds like something which we already know. Then we feel that it is going wrong. There is a sort of automatic recording within us, which also automatically spits out all the recorded stuff also the garbage, and then one stops.

*Question:* Have you any way of eliminating acoustical rubbish from the creative process?

*Stockhausen:* Certainly. While playing Intuitive Music it becomes extremely obvious which musician has the most self-control; the musicians soon reveal whether they are critical, whether the physical and spiritual sides are in a certain balance etc. Some musicians are very easily confused, because they do not listen. That is the usual reason for rubbish in the sense that they produce dynamic levels which erode the rest for quite some time, without realising it themselves. In certain situations some become very totalitarian, for example, and that leads to really awful situations of ensemble playing. The sounds then become extremely aggressive and destructive; they operate on a very low level of communication, and destructive elements prevail (I hope we understand one another: I do not only mean simply "ugly" or "beautiful" when I say "low" level; I mean bodily, physically destroying each other). Then they all play at once. This is one of the most important criteria, that one must constantly remind oneself: "Do not play all the time", and "Do not get carried away to act all the time".

After several hundred years of having been forced to play only what was prescribed by the composers, once musicians now have the opportunity in Intuitive Music to play all the time, they do. The playing immediately becomes very loud, and the musicians do not know how to get soft again, because everybody wants to be heard. I mean, it is easy to get loud, but how can you get soft again? Finally you think: "Nobody hears me anyway, so I might as well stop".

These are the general principles of group behaviour, of group playing.

*Question:* Are you saying that value standards are emerging out of this?

*Stockhausen:* Completely new standards which we have never learned before for playing music; values which we discover for the first time when playing in a group, and especially each time there is a new member. Generally, it takes quite a while for a new member to integrate himself into our kind of ensemble playing.

*Question:* Concerning the collective interaction, there must be a critical number of members for this group?

*Stockhausen:* Right. That is why I always say that the mass begins with 7; with more than 7 all becomes too dense. Exceptional personalities are needed when the group is larger than 7 say 8 or 9 players. The best number is 4 or 5. Even with 6, in my opinion, one needs a lot of self-discipline to stop playing for relatively long periods of time during the performance, and to know exactly when the right moment has come, so that also solos and duos and trios occur not just sextets all the time.

*Question:* Have such attempts been made by groups which have existed for a long time, such as a string quartet, for example?

*Stockhausen:* No.

*Question:* Does the quality of the performance have anything to do with the musicians' technical ability on their instruments?

*Stockhausen:* Yes and no. For example, when one plays awkwardly, the intuition cannot work well; the tool, the instrument is not trained. That means that the musician becomes dependent on his body and he always wants more than it can do. Then rubbish again results. In such a situation someone is best qualified who does not have to think twice about the technical aspect

*Question:* someone who is completely master of his instrument. How about the tam-tam? Is that

*Stockhausen:* Well, you know what I mean: someone who has lived and experimented with the tam-tam for a long time. I do not mean someone who can play all the Liszt études it can even be quite difficult to play with such a person, because he can't get them out of his system any more. It is almost impossible unless he really concentrates on getting away from all these pre-established techniques. Rather, I mean someone who is completely united with his instrument, who knows where to touch it and what to do in order to set it into vibration, so that the inner vibrations which occur within the player can immediately be transformed into the outer vibrations of the instrument. That is the whole secret, naturally, the shortest way.

*Question:* Suppose you were in a group and acted according to an assigned text. You would think nothing. How then, can you make actions to create a sound? And do you classify awareness as a form of thinking, or is it something else?

*Stockhausen:* If I know that I am doing this, and that my co-player is doing something else, this realisation is an act of thinking and I call that thinking. What do you mean by awareness? Do you mean that I think that I am sitting here playing? Or not even that rather, that I just play?

*Question:* I mean, that you are aware of the other sounds

*Stockhausen:* All the time, naturally one is inside the sound

*Question:* So you separate awareness from thinking?

*Stockhausen:* Yes, without a doubt. Thinking is a mental process: pre-planning, remembering, recording, calculating all these different mental activities. For example, there are pieces which demand that one makes a plan; that one should imagine the next event each time and then play it exactly the way it was imagined. One thus thinks out a musical event, then plays it.

*Question:* But you are reacting to each other, aren't you? That is what I mean by awareness.

*Stockhausen:* Actually we are reacting to or acting in the direction of what is in the air. It is not really re-action: we are busy with the sound we are working on shaping the sound which is in the air.

*Question:* In your theatre piece OBEN UND UNTEN you require the instrumentalists to first play KURZWELLEN, with the actors listening before they perform OBEN UND UNTEN. Why is this?

*Stockhausen:* I thought it would be the best training and the best stimulus. In KURZWELLEN, the players have to react to something that is unforeseeable because it comes out of the radio. They have to respond spontaneously to the short-wave material. And in the theatre piece, I expect the musicians also to react instantaneously to the spontaneous verbal material that comes from the speakers from the man, from the woman, and from the child. In the same way, I expect the man, the woman, and the child to say something intuitively which is evoked by the sounds produced by the musicians. Now in order to train for this, it is best to sit in front of a radio and react to that which is heard, and then always change with whatever comes, immediately doing what occurs to you while listening to the radio because in doing this you cannot cheat yourself.

*Question:* You say that you call this music Intuitive Music because improvisation is always related to a certain system

*Stockhausen:* Style

*Question:* to a pattern. What about improvisation like that of the Globokar group?

*Stockhausen:* He calls it improvisation. I would not recommend calling it that.

*Question:* What would you call it then intuitive?

*Stockhausen:* Yes, I would say so.

*Question:* Do you think Globokar would call it that?

*Stockhausen:* What do you want to talk about now: opinions or analysis?

*Question:* I simply would like to know exactly where the difference between improvisation and intuition lies.

*Stockhausen:* In Intuitive Music, I try to get away from anything that has established itself as musical style. In improvised music, there is always, as history has shown, some basic element rhythmic, or melodic or harmonic on which the improvisation is based.

In the Globokar group it is clear, for example, that although the musicians intend to play "out of the void", and although nothing is prescribed and there also are, allegedly, no prior agreements from time to time the percussion player Drouet plays tabla rhythms familiar to us from Indian music. He once studied tabla playing for a short time with an Indian tabla player, and these stylistic elements emerge from him automatically. So there is no pre-established style for this music as a whole, but certain stylistic elements come into the music which I would try to avoid, in order to completely concentrate on intuition. The same is true of Portal, the clarinet player. Whenever he gets into a rage when the musicians are "heated up" he plays typical free-jazz melodies, configurations which he, as a free jazz player, has played for years. There are certain idioms that come from the group he played with, and from the free jazz tradition in general. At such moments, one finds oneself therefore in a certain style. Even though the musicians do not intend to play such styles, they have not eliminated them

*Question:* But systematized patterns are a part of improvisation.

*Stockhausen:* Yes, this has been so historically.

*Question:* No, it should be so, and it always will be so or has always been so.

*Stockhausen:* Now, that completely depends on us. If one calls what I do "improvisation", then it must be added: "Be careful, the term improvisation is now very broad and is no longer related to any agreements". But in such a case, I prefer a new term. Therefore, I suggest the following: baroque music, Indian music, some African music for example music from Mozambique is improvised music. Let's call that improvisation and leave it at that.

*Question:* And free jazz?

*Stockhausen:* It is "free jazz" because the word "jazz" means that a certain style is aimed at. Something specific is desired, which sets into motion that which is being played.

*Question:* What I heard on your tape recording today was Western classical music. I could tell that it was played by people whose training was in classical music.

*Stockhausen:* What do you mean by "classical"? I am completely thrown by your comment, because for me, classical music is something which has been composed. It has certain characteristics as regards rhythm, harmony, melody and form, and I do not find any of this in the music which I presented.

*Question:* I could tell by the gestures that the players were socially sophisticated, people who come from this particular culture in which we now find ourselves as opposed, for example, to Eskimos.

*Stockhausen:* That is obviously the case. What shall I say now? I mean I cannot change the situation.

*Question:* Yes, and thus in that sense it is also improvised music, because it is narrowed by the cultural frame of reference.

*Stockhausen:* If someone comes from the star Sirius and hears terrestrial music, he says: "So that's terrestrial music: no matter how hard they try to be intuitive, there is certainly a very typical channelling of intuition on this Earth as compared to Sirius". Naturally one can argue like that, if you wish. We are not yet universal, if that is what you want to say.

*Question:* Would you like to work with musicians who have a completely different musical background?

*Stockhausen:* By all means. I also do it. I am not tied to this group. For years I have been trying to replace certain players, who cannot get away from what you have just described. I realise that their limitations are too great. They have reached a certain limit and now cannot surpass it. I observe that these musicians cannot develop themselves further. Their possibilities seem to have come to an end, because they are not simultaneously working on the further development of their personalities.

*Question:* Don't you also think that this is the right way to find one's true inner culture musically, in the same way as you make your Intuitive Music in a group?

*Stockhausen:* It is difficult to speak about this. Basically it means to make contact with all that has been called intuition. In traditional music we are accustomed to say that a composer has only brief moments of intuition. (Let's say he had an inspiration in a tram or during a walk, and then he worked out the so-called idea or sound-vision for the next few weeks.) One imagines such inspirations like a flash of lightning in the night. At this point, I would like to make it clear that I am searching to discover a technique for myself as composer and interpreter and also for the other musicians who work with me to consciously extend these lightning-like moments of intuition; a technique which can actuate intuition when I want to start working, so that I am not a victim, having to wait until it comes. It often used to come, namely, at the wrong moment, when I had no time, or just when someone else wanted to talk with me. I must find a technique through which the intuition can be started and stopped. And these moments of intuitive working must last longer, as long as I want. But then I have to find a completely new technique for making music. I cannot simply sit in front of a piece of paper with my pencil sharpened and my eraser ready, and then write down what my intuition administers to me, because the intuition has a very particular kind of speed, which is by no means congruent with the speed of writing.

And that is the crux: for 600, 700, 800 years we have learned to translate music which we perceive intuitively into the visual, to represent it by means of a system we have agreed upon. Most of it is mechanical work. As I have said, in all my works there are always only a few

intuitive moments which determine entire sections of several minutes, as it later turns out. Then I start working like a mechanic for days and weeks, calculating the details, etc. But I always knew what I wanted from the first moment on, and thus, most of this work is actually industry. As every insider knows, genius is 95% hard work and 5% intuition. I would like to add that this conception ought to come to an end as fast as possible. It is based on the unbelievably complicated process in which we have been trapped since Gutenberg, in fact ever since the first monks started to write down music. It was necessary as a mediation between composer and interpreter to write music on paper, then give it to someone who was like a musical mailman transporting it to another city, for instance, where other musicians could read it and transform it into sounds again. And now this process somehow is coming to an end. Namely, we do not need this mail any longer. I can fly there myself by plane or send a tape.

We must therefore develop completely new processes in order to find the time inherent in intuition and to work within this time of intuition so that intuition can last, and so that one does not always have to interrupt and say, "Wait a minute, first I have to write it down", by which time naturally it has slipped away again. This "Wait a minute", has become a source of frustration for most artists in the field of music, at least for the composers, and I would say that the traditional concept of the composer as a writer of music no longer suffices.

*Question:* What happens if you repeat a piece like ES in the coming weeks? Surely you must be bound, having once played in a certain way, to remember certain details and thus to play it similarly?

*Stockhausen:* No, I do not want to repeat anything.

*Question:* Do you think it would be completely different?

*Stockhausen:* Once you are on the track to follow intuition, you even try to abandon what you have learned the features of the repetition, the mechanisms of the reproduction. Certainly a new realisation would be completely different.

*Question:* In your opinion, is it possible to revive the intuition of the people in the hall?

*Stockhausen:* You mean a feed-back with the listeners?

*Question:* With the listeners, yes. And that, in fact, completes the circle with the intuitive also the meditative with a

*Stockhausen:* Definitely. If there are people in a hall who emit bad waves, nothing works. And the stronger they are, the worse it goes. One feels very bad when one has a destructive public, or when certain elements in the public are simply in an antagonistic mood, emitting destructive waves against whatever is developing. In some places we had to just give up. The people didn't even know why; but we knew that it was not the right place to stay and to work on a process, I mean, to form something. Yes, the public becomes immensely important, but not in the sense that they sometimes imagine. The public thinks that it is a great thing, in emancipated society, that there someone is playing and that the others consume it. That it the public is to be fed with music with my music, which is fixed once and forever, and namely in the traditional one-way information, the most extreme forms of which are records, radio and television.

Those who now wish to "critically" change these circumstances say, "Well, then you'll have to bring along whistles and stomp on the floor and jump around and talk with the musicians: everyone has to participate in the music and take part in the creative process!". Then the whole thing turns into something terribly primitive, because the people are neither innerly prepared, nor do they really want to form something extraordinary; they just want to manifest themselves and participate in a noisy event. So usually when these things have been done and they have been variously tried out in recent years, little instruments were handed out, or it was announced that with the help of the voice, sounds would be made together. Sometimes, someone also gave entries here and there, or tried to articulate the whole thing. Or else there was simply no one, and what happened, happened. Within a few seconds, it normally turned into a very loud din, in which no one could hear himself any longer. And then it simply remained a loud chaos, until the people got tired out.

But there is a completely different method to participate in a new way. Sometimes you find it in Indian music. There, a small group of listeners sits around the players and "comments" using gestures and voice. The players are encouraged in a wonderful way by these signs of the listeners and respond accordingly. There is a communion between those who are listening and those who are playing. Then the separation between those who are helping to build the wave-creation with their inner generators, and the musicians who are plucking the strings, is no longer so important. One forgets about the physicality of the frantically active hands, feet or tongue. Then this incredible feed-back is reached between people who are together and similarly tuned in a wonderful way. When musicians play in the presence of such a public, the most extraordinary things can happen, precisely also be-cause of these people.

*Question:* Do you think it is possible also for people who have no "higher knowledge" to make Intuitive Music?

*Stockhausen:* Yes, certainly. It is like falling in love with someone you did not know before.

*Question:* I would have thought that really good Intuitive Music very much depends on the individual members of a group knowing each other very well.

*Stockhausen:* As the gentleman has just said that can also go wrong. Or, on the contrary, a new player can tremendously inspire. There is also a magnetism which suddenly attracts players to each other; they feel well tuned to one another. But sometimes it suddenly stops, and one feels, "Hm I was mistaken, he can't, or I can't we both can't". Generally it is best if the players know each other well.

*Question:* I would like to return to the relation of style and Intuitive Music. Isn't the last piece that you played for us recognisable in any way as a piece which you composed, as compared to another composer who also writes a text which gives rise to an intuitive performance? Are you not really trapped in some way by something which is recognisable as your piece of music and not that of another composer?

*Stockhausen:* Yes, there is something to that. It is impossible for people who up to now have played something that bore my name to think that I do not exist. The fact that they know I exist and that that which they are doing has something to do with my name, leads them to very specific things. There is no question about it: all the musicians have told me as much. As a name, I am a myth. There is a body, and this body has a tag: a name. When this body does not

exist any more, the name will completely transform into a myth, together with all the things which have crystallised around it, including the many opinions and convictions about what it would have done, if it were still alive. There are many minds that have already made a complete picture out of me a myth; and that myth creates something of itself. So I am a myth of myself also to myself. But that means that I am not only interested in this particular body and its biography, because it is only one of many appearances, and the others are actually just as mysterious for me as the one I have now.

Nor am I only interested in this one name. The name stands for something that manifests itself through me: that is all I know. Thus, whenever I do something, certain things should be right in the way I think they should be right: there is a certain integrity that manifests itself through me. It must be something with which I can completely identify. And the musicians who have worked with me even those who read a score or an article of mine feel something of this and strive to also achieve it. Even if I were just to say, "Play", I would have said it, as opposed to Mr. X having said it: that makes a decisive difference.

So, someone has come into the world with this myth, and it will remain for as long as people retain the myth or are possessed by that spirit. It is a spiritual force that manifests itself through one human being and affects many others. And this creates a world within the world: there is no question about that. Thus, no matter how "free" the playing instructions are, people will always say, "Well, I cannot help it, it sounds like your music". And even if I say that it is not my music, that I do not own any aspect of it all that does not change anything, because all the works I have composed before are also contained in this one interpretation. They have encircled certain spiritual processes, musical processes.

*Question:* Do you think that in time, your music will be classified as classical music?

*Stockhausen:* It is really a pity, but as long as people want to also pigeon-hole music, yes. Namely, these pigeon-holes have a very special function, particularly in our society, because these classifications originate from people who classify themselves. This also holds true for people who classify themselves into the realm of "pop-culture". It is very difficult for people to get out of the "class" they want to belong to, because they are, in fact, innerly against all other classes as long as they stick to this system. Actually, that is ridiculous: I belong to that, to which I want to belong. A free man does not need to belong to any class. If someone says to me that I belong to a particular class, he thus really classifies himself, just by using for instance "classic" as a tag. It has economic and social reasons classic people want to be in a classic society, classic employees in classic surroundings, they want to have a classic car, a classic suit and a "classy" partner these things have a lot to do with each other.

I am glad that the music is distributed on records I then become fairly anonymous, just a "name" and that it permeates all layers of taste and all classes. In this I have been very lucky, because my records are bought by pop fans, by lovers of classical music, by people who like modern music and also by people who enjoy oriental music or folk music. At least the record companies say that it is amazing and they actually do not understand why It seems that the music I have produced breaks out of the realms of classification to an ever increasing measure: it does not fit into these pigeon-holes. But we'll see. Perhaps you are right, that in 50 years they may again say: "He is a classical composer".

*Question:* Let's say there is a musician who is highly trained, but knows nothing about the



sounds you make otherwise, and you would give him this music to play. What do you think is going to happen? Have you ever tried it? he has heard before. It is really a very decisive turning point in the development of a musician, to break out of his whole environment, training, and technical mechanics. So a very conscious being is needed: he must know the music of the world. He must already be a world-wide informed mind, who has travelled in many countries, or heard records of the music of all other cultures, in order to avoid it all.

*Question:* Would you say that a musician who wishes to play a piece like IT must by all means know your music well before he can play IT?

*Stockhausen:* No, this does not necessarily have to be the case. My instinct tells me that because of my instruction "Do not think anything and then start to play" he would just try out the strings of his instrument, and would stop all the time because of the instruction that he should stop whenever he thinks something. I don't know: we would have to try it. The brain can function as a filter to avoid all stylistic clichés. When therefore, this musician thinks (because the instructions say after all "Do not think, and when you have attained the state of non-thinking, start playing") he can stretch this thinking-process to as long as he likes between the moments of playing. That is what we do when we play this piece. We listen to each other and when someone thinks "What strange stuff he is playing", he stops. Then he tries to return to the state of non-thinking once more and starts again. So thinking is not excluded: it is always active when one is not playing. The thinking acts as a kind of filter: when one thinks during the performance, one can be very critical of what one has played oneself or what the others are playing. And this thinking then conditions after the thinking has been stopped the entire manner of playing during the following phase of non-thinking.

*Question:* I feel that all of us here could stop our thinking and our emotions the things that we are conditioned by, everything that is going on around us to simply achieve a complete calm within ourselves. Then, what there is in each of us will be the same, and the only problem would be to wipe out all the conditions created in us by television, newspapers and advertisements. So, if one took a piece like IT to its logical end, then perhaps it would always sound the same, no matter who is playing it, no matter where it is heard. Since what we have heard is recognisably played by Stockhausen's musicians, I would like to ask if you also feel that you have not yet performed this piece as perfectly as it is actually written?

*Stockhausen:* Please, give us a chance. Just three years of musical history have elapsed since something like this has surfaced or even been seriously considered, and none of the musicians who have participated in this music has dramatically changed his life: that is a pity. They are all continuing to live more or less the way they did before. Nevertheless, all of them have changed to a certain degree, more or less, depending on their personality. It will take time. Not just with this generation but also with the one to come. I have great confidence in what will emerge from these seeds.

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# Stockhausen's Intuitive Music

by Hugh Davies

First printed in *Musics*, April/May 1975, p.10-11.

Many people who are enthusiastic about the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen tend to be unsure about his pieces from the set known as "Aus den sieben Tagen" (= From the seven days). This is a set of text-scores, short verbal instructions with no conventional musical notation, composed in May 1968.

The usual reactions to these pieces, based more on what the scores consist of rather than on the music which is produced from them, is to talk about Stockhausen's recent musical interests and to dismiss the pieces as improvisations.

I would like to start by saying something about my own experiences with improvisation and what Stockhausen calls (in such compositions) intuitive music. In the last few years I have played composed music as a member of Gentle Fire and have been a member of two other, now defunct, groups, Music Improvisation Company and Naked Software, both of which were purely concerned with improvisation - Naked Software with no predetermined stylistic limitations (each member had a very different musical background), Music Improvisation Company, by virtue of the common background of the majority of its members, a so-called free jazz group. In the latter the structural and musical material was more restricted, but at the same time the interactions between the musicians were tighter. In both groups you could play in the secure knowledge that one or more of the other players, almost always particular players that one was "aiming at", would react to you in a particular way, without necessarily playing the sort of thing that you might have expected them to play - in other words a security which enabled unrestricted exploration of the new musical possibilities to take place.

In Gentle Fire we have a similar trust in each other. Occasionally we do perform improvisations in which nothing is planned in advance, but on the whole we seem to be more at home in performing our own group compositions, works composed by individual members of the group, and compositions by other composers which suit our particular way of playing together. The text pieces from "Aus den sieben Tagen" come into the latter category. In each of these pieces some kind of structural indication is given by the text. Some examples:

Verbindung (= Connection)

- specific rhythm and tempo suggestions ("... in the rhythm of your heart, .... your breathing, .... your thinking", etc.)

Treffpunkt (= Meeting Place)

- a structure based on a rondo-like form in which each musician must return at different (unspecified) times to the sound with which he began.

Richtige Dauern ( = Right Durations)

- concentration on finding the appropriate duration for each sound that one plays.

Setz die Segel zur Sonne ( = Set sail for the sun)

- "listen to the tones of the others .... and slowly move your tone until you arrive at complete harmony and the whole sound turns gold..." (NB One should read "note" for the American "tone".)

In addition, all the players (most of these pieces are headed "for ensemble" or "for small ensemble") follow the same instructions, generally independently but in parallel, which reinforces the indications given in the score. The results are very different from the structures and relationships that arise in unpremeditated improvisation where one is able to play more or less what one wants at any moment, in a comparatively self-indulgent way, providing that one takes into consideration what the other musicians are doing. Apart from anything else, the form of free improvisation is almost invariably a slow wave-like shape of alternating climaxes and relaxation, with a remarkably consistent average time for a single "set" of around 45 minutes.

Here is a closer analysis of one piece from "Aus den Sieben Tagen", called "Intensität" ( = Intensity) which I have chosen for its apparant lack of information.

for ensemble

INTENSITY

play single sounds  
with such dedication  
until you feel the warmth  
that radiates from you

play on and sustain it  
as long as you can

(printed by kind permission of Universal Edition)

Nothing more is given. Looking at the elements of this text that relate to musical structures and procedures, at the beginning it has "play single sounds". For each sound a player may choose to play a texture more complex than a single pitch,

which in some cases may become almost a phrase (the same German word is deliberately translated in some texts by "sound" and in others by "tone/note"). The continuation, "with such dedication / until you feel the warmth / that radiates from you", implies a development of this basic element, including the probability that the performers will individually introduce new elements from time to time, but always with the tendency towards increasing the intensity of their playing and their involvement in the production of each sound. Finally, "play on and sustain it / as long as you can" gives an indication of the way in which the performance ends, which is likely to be either an abrupt halt by the whole ensemble while at full strength or a fairly rapid dying away as the musicians end one after another. No direct co-ordination between the players is mentioned.

Performing such a piece, especially in an ensemble that works together regularly and specialises in such areas of music, one is very conscious of playing a definite composition, even though the nature of it is such that one need only think the text over quietly to oneself before starting to play, and then everything happens intuitively - one need not be fully conscious of what one is playing, one "becomes the music". In many ways this is very close to a group improvisation, with the difference that - in spite of frequent comments from various quarters about the performers and not the composer being the ones who should collect the performing right fees for such music - one remains aware of the composer influencing the performance from a distance through his score. And the structural indication in the scores discussed above ensure that those elements at least will make the result completely different from a free improvisation.

In Stockhausen's intuitive music, as well as in text-scores by other composers, what is gained from the point of view of the performer who works with composed music is the freedom to play the next sound or group of sounds when one is ready to do so, to select it on the basis of the context of what one has just played and what other musicians are playing, and to concentrate on musical quality rather than technique - instead of counting silences, playing complex rhythmic values (or rather thinking of them as complex), following a conductor's beat, all in addition to playing notes precisely written down by the composer.

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"Aus den sieben Tagen"

Score available from:

<http://www.karlheinzstockhausen.org/>

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## INTERNATIONAL IMPROVISED MUSIC ARCHIVE - SHIBA TETSU (Japan, b.1959)

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Shiba Tetsu is an improvising musician. After the first performance of John Zorn's so-called game piece cobra around 1992, voice performer Makigami Kouichi organized Cobra Tokyo Operation starting in 1993 in La MAMA, Shibuya, Tokyo. Inspired by participation in this, Shiba Tetsu conducted numerous workshops in the following years, each with five participants. In these workshops, players created their own game pieces and played them. In 2005, Shiba Tetsu estimated the number of workshops held to be between 20 and 30.

[Two Game Pieces by Shiba Tetsu \(English\).](#)

[Two Game Pieces by Shiba Tetsu \(Japanese\).](#)

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## SHIBA TETSU: TWO GAME PIECES

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### HAND PIECE (WITH MEMORY FUNCTION)

#### A. Cues:

1. Hand down --> change music
2. Show 1-3 then indicate head --> memorize music (no change in the music which is played)
3. Show 1-3 then hand down --> recall and play memorized music
4. Show 5 then hand down --> End

#### B. Rules

- all (non) instruments are OK
- all members can show cue whenever
- on every cue, at the moment when hand down, next music section starts

Notes. Cues start by showing 1, 2 3 or 4 fingers. After the other players have noticed this, in cue number 2 and 3 one more number is given. "Show 1-3" etc. means: show one of the numbers 1, 2 or 3 with corresponding number of fingers. The piece lasts until someone gives the "end" cue.

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### GAME PIECE: LET'S PLAY WHAT WE CAN PLAY IN SINGLE HAND + ORCHESTRATIONS ETUDE

#### A. Cues:

1. Solo (everybody plays in turn)

☐

2. Divide into 2 groups

☐

3. All members play

☐

#### Rules

- all (non) instruments are OK
- one hand plays instrument, other hand shows cue
- all members can show cue whenever
- listen to the whole sound and operate orchestration to make it interesting
- at every cue, next music section starts at the moment when hand is taken down
- both for solo and when group is divided into 2 groups: when next player or group starts, the first player or groups stops.

## A. 合図

# 振り下ろし（メモリー機能付き）

4人から10人程度の演奏者のためのゲームピース

2005/10/10

しばてつ記

### 合図A.手を振り下ろす

⇒今演奏している音楽を変化させる。振り下ろした瞬間に、各自同時に。

### 合図B.指で「1」（又は「2」又は「3」）を示し、自分の頭を指す。

⇒今、演奏している音楽を「1」（又は「2」又は「3」）として記憶する。記憶するだけで演奏は変化させない。

### 合図C.指で「1」（又は「2」又は「3」）を示し、手を振り下ろす。

⇒記憶した音楽の再現。

合図2で「1」（又は「2」又は「3」）として記憶した演奏を再現する。振り下ろした瞬間に再現演奏を開始する。

### 合図D.指で「5」を示し、手を振り下ろす。

⇒お終い。振り下ろした瞬間に。

## B. ルール

- ・どんな（非）楽器でも参加可能。
- ・演奏者は全員いつでも合図を出せる。
- ・どの合図も手を振り下ろした瞬間に次のセクションへ移行する。

### ルール補足

- ・お互いの合図が見えるように円形、半円形に並ぶ。
- ・演奏中は他の演奏者をよく見て、合図を見過ごさないように気をつける。
- ・合図はメンバー全員が了解できるよう明確に出す。
- ・誰かが合図を出したら一旦従う。すぐに他の演奏者が別の合図を出しても良い。
- ・この合図とルールを使って、他に何か制限を設けて演奏するのも面白い。例えば、音数を極度に少なくやろう、小さい音でやろう、特殊奏法だけでやろう、身ぶりが大きく音が小さい演奏をやろう、などなど。

## 片手で出来ることをしよう

4人から10人程度の演奏者のためのオーケストレーション・エチュード

2005/10/10

しばてつ記

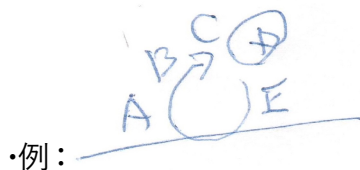
### A. 合図

#### 合図1.

で「1」を示し手を振り下ろす。

⇒状態1：順番に solo の演奏を始める。

(誰から始めるのか、時計周りか反対か、も指示する。)



・例：メンバー D から時計周り

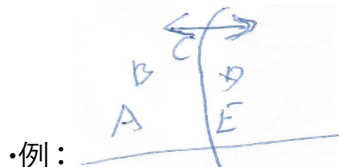
・合図の出し方：「1」、D を指差す、時計回りを指で示す、手を振り下ろす。

#### 合図2.

で「2」を示し手を振り下ろす。

⇒状態2：2つのグループに分れて交互に演奏し始める。

(グループ分けとどちらが先に音を出すのかも指示する)



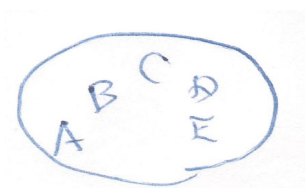
・例：ABC と DE のグループに分れ、DE から演奏を始める

・合図の出し方：「2」、CとDの間に中空に線を描きグループ分けする、DEのグループを指して先に音を出すグループを示す、手を振り下ろす。

#### 状態3.

で「3」を示し手を振り下ろす。

⇒状態3：全員の演奏を始める。





状態5.

で「5」を示し手を振り下ろす。

⇒状態5：お終い。

## INTERNATIONAL IMPROVISED MUSIC ARCHIVE - JACK WRIGHT (USA, b.1942)

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Saxophonist, director of Springgarden CD label. Author of the book The free musics. (Spring Garden Music Editions) 2017. Homepage: [www.springgardenmusic.com](http://www.springgardenmusic.com) .

[Essays](#) (1983-2005)

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### PLAYING

Free improvisation cannot be defined or understood as a series of positive propositions, like a program that can be advertised and advocated. At the heart of it is an essential conflict.

On the one hand, it is playing for its own sake, “just playing”, the activity without the intent to create any object that can be judged, not even to create musicians. It is unselfconscious spontaneity, attracting those who love risking themselves and growing out of their skins. It encourages one to play free of judgment and conclusion for a period of time that is unlimited, ended only arbitrarily. Sometimes it is difficult to tell when the playing has stopped, since all the boundaries of play are only temporary, and spontaneity inherently transgresses boundaries. This could include boundaries between sound, movement, and speech as well, everything can be brought into play. There is spontaneity in all music at the moment of playing; this playing however puts it at the center, as the *sine qua non*.

Playing *with* boundaries rather *inside* of them is the challenge of free improvisation to our commodified culture, which requires predictability in order to function. It is what makes free playing so difficult to categorize, assimilate, market, reproduce and teach. Music in all its genres can be recorded, copied, packaged, etc. and will still convey its meaning as music, whereas this is playing before we or anyone can understand it as music.

Those who play are persons who choose to play with sound and silence rather than musicians who seek to fulfill their role through playing. They relate to each other as persons playing rather than as musicians. Some may have learned that role and take it on in their lives, even seriously without acknowledging they are playing a role, but when they play freely they leave it aside. A role is a mask intended to impress others, which all of us use in varying degrees and with varying success in order to participate in society. It must be performed for those who do not share that role as well as those who do. Like actors musicians usually call themselves performers; they follow a script that non-players must be able to recognize. But in free playing there is no script; one literally does not know what will happen. One cannot predict what style or form the playing will take, and cannot promise that it will be anything like before. The skills a musician has worked on to create a certain music may be entirely inappropriate to a free playing situation compared to a player looking forward to the unexpected. Free players therefore cannot be ranked according to the amount of musical training they have received, or how fast or efficiently they play, or even their command of a vocabulary. It is even questionable whether as free players they can be considered successful or not, since there are no winners or losers here.

Free playing is defined more by what it is not than what it is. Since only what is definable can be said to have form, it is not a form of music in a catalogue of forms or genres. It is not above or below the attainment of form so much as aside from it, seeking it, one might say, only to dissolve it. As it does not involve success or failure to reproduce a form given from outside the moment, it cannot be rehearsed (the French call rehearsal a *répétition*). One cannot “get it right”, so it is free of that kind of judgment (as in jazz one might validly accuse the drummer of not keeping time). It does not need to be recorded; some would say it cannot be, since the recording of the playing is not the playing. As for performing, others can be present who do not participate, but if the players begin to shift their interest to performing, attempting to please, provoke or otherwise draw the attention of the non-players, then they have lost focus on the central activity of playing.

To the extent that players are deeply drawn to this spontaneity they will not be bothered by the cultural rejection of what they do as music, which refers to the results and products of playing. All music is played, at one time or another, but not all playing is music or intended to become music. Free improvisation is playing that is valued by the players whether it is considered music or not. It is valued at the moment of playing or not at all.

This is not playing according to rules, it is making the rules as we go along. Indeed, they can hardly be called rules if no one is bound by anything consistently over the time of playing. One might be tempted to say that if someone consistently plays too loudly, too densely, or overplays they violate a rule. But we can also imagine that as simply another situation to surprise us, even a stimulus. At least it is debatable; even if we choose not to play with that person right then, there might be another context where such playing is perfect. There is no aesthetic in charge. We might wish the other would do something different, but we’ve chosen not to put any force behind that, since we want everyone to be free to do what he or she wants, not the least so that we ourselves can be free.

One might consider it a rule to suspend judgment of others during playing, as a mental act that impedes it. This is more an aid to playing well than a rule, however, and is unenforceable. Sometimes people say the one rule is non-judgmental listening, but no one can define how that is to be judged and make it stick, and a true rule would have to provide a clear idea to all players of what this means in all cases. But there is an overall intent guiding play. That is to do whatever enables the freedom of the playing, to be open to all possibilities, and to avoid creating rules for specifically how to play.

Lacking external musical and market standards, no one can be excluded from free playing. If anything goes then anyone is invited in. No one is excluded except those whose intention is not to play freely but insist on playing according to external rules, boundaries that are not brought into the play. Only the absence of rules might qualify as a consistent, defining rule; it is why free improvisation is more adequately called non-idiomatic music. If you are playing a musical idiom, however well, like classical music or jazz, then it will make it difficult for the free players to continue their playing, for someone has entered whose playing is based on what is derived from outside what is happening at the moment. It blocks others from playing, and

free playing aims at an atmosphere that encourages it to continue. It is a kind of noise, like the interference of a constant motor sound, whereas it is often possible to play freely with ambient, changing sounds, which approach the contributions of the players.

Another kind of noise comes from musical personalities, players who have developed a style for solo performance and cannot leave it at the door when they enter free playing. This is another case where musical skill and even the greatest recognized success is of negative value. It is like when the trained soloist is included in a chorus; the voice can often be clearly distinguished, when what is desired is anonymity and blending with others.

Finally, playing cannot be determined by an aesthetic, as in the various genres and subgenres of music. An aesthetic is a rule, a predetermination of what is and is not considered valid, and is vital to presenting and marketing any music to a consuming audience. Like jazz or any other form, it can be duplicated from player to player, and can expand players' vocabulary once they adopt its rules. There is certainly room inside an aesthetic, like the current one of quiet and minimal sounds, just as there is in jazz, a significant element of spontaneity. But true free playing has no inside or outside. One doesn't even play "outside the box", when any box that begins to appear gets flattened.

These are all aspects of free improvisation that make it extremely attractive to many--the abandonment of roles, the escape from rules, acceptance of all who choose to play, the challenge to commodified music, and the focus on the present moment. It also fits well in a culture that presents itself as valuing freedom. In its modern form, after all, free playing was born during the period of our culture when free spirits and spontaneity were valued more highly than the rules and roles of society. Significant numbers of people felt this, and it was hard not to believe that things were moving in that direction. In an age like the present, however, that spirit is often looked on either cynically or nostalgically, as something that is no longer possible. Now it is common to think that everyone is ruled by the required social roles, the only game in town. The freedom of that earlier era could easily be seen as deceptive, faulty, and naïve.

Indeed that freedom is naïve, but not because of the misery of social rules and the marketplace. It is more that freedom requires deep self-awareness and questioning in order to get past the surface appearance. When we look closely we find that we're not so free as we would like to think. The love of play and freedom are only one half of what is going on, one side of the story. It's as if the optimism of "man is born free but everywhere is in chains" must recognize the pessimism of "I have met the enemy and he is us." That is, if there are no rules then we are always going to be able to ask ourselves what we should be doing. We make our sounds in an environment that is free of judgment as music, yet that environment also allows the free play of our doubts about the validity of every sound we make, how we relate to others through sound. These questions arise in the course of playing and are not settled by any role or social context, or by external standards of what is or is

not good music. We face only each other in the room, even if we carry that room with us onto a stage. We are stripped of a support system of which we are normally unaware, our self-esteem, that tells us that we are doing a good job. If free playing dissolves the notion of how good music would be defined then our attachment to the ability to make good music just gets in the way. When everyone is engaged in the same thing we have no one to impress, least of all ourselves.

If the effort is to keep musical forms or idioms or aesthetics from entering and dominating, then players are constantly trying to go beyond the forms of music they were and still are inspired by. The violinist trained in the classical tradition and the saxophonist originally inspired by jazz will have to work very hard to free themselves from the emblematic clichés that indicate and nuance those forms. If they play notes they will take care not to evoke musical forms in any way by the sequence of pitches, not even to take a stance of violating a form. Also, one will work to deconstruct the very form given by the sound of the instrument, what makes it identifiable. This is why so much free playing involves extended techniques, another indication that it strives to be “extra-musical”. The tendency is to play with sound rather than to play an instrument, and this is easier said than done.

If one is not given a form to reproduce nor is one given a context to determine what is appropriate, not even the direction other players are going. Listening is more a guide than a rule, another word for awareness of the moment and resonating with it, finding its pace, going where it goes on its ever-changeable way. One might even say that as players we are not free to dislike what we hear, to choose it to be different than what it is. If we do, we are outside the circle of playing, as is the critic and audience, who have opinions about the music as the substitute for participation. Listening, however, is a different matter, it is more important than the playing, and more difficult to know how to do.

Free playing has attracted people partly because they were bounded by external rules of a society that would define and control us, and we want to be in charge of ourselves. It is associated with peace, the ending of struggle and boundaries, as if the walls around us would collapse by themselves. But free playing cannot deliver on this; at least after the initial excitement one begins to realize freedom involves an ever fuller awareness of how we have bounded ourselves. It is difficult, hard work, chosen by those who like to deal with these conflicts that never get finally resolved. It is not surprising that there are very few who choose to do this, few who find it possible or even conceivable to play without knowing the rules.

Here then is encouragement for being children at play, but at the same time adults who are self-conscious to the point at times of feeling defeated. To engage in this is to learn how to balance playing with an insecurity that is inherent, for there is nothing we can do that will provide the rewards that social roles promise, such as Master Player. The actual playing will always be a huge distance from the entrepreneurs of the musical marketplace, who proudly present achievements. But there is another kind of reward for players. We have the pleasure to work alongside of sound, sharing nature, rather than functioning as engineers who create, control, and produce it as

music, alienating themselves from it. We approach the silence of nature, and wonder whether entering into silence wouldn't take us further than uttering another sound. We face a kind of emptiness, and without that, and the strength to explore it and grow through it, we have not begun the real possibilities of playing.

Jack Wright, Sept. 2005.

This essay was inspired by James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games*. It is an evolution out of two essays I wrote in 1988, *Theatre of the Moment*, and *Against Improvisation*, which I issued as a single booklet.

## **What do we have to do with this mess?**

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So far as its music goes, the segment of the avant-garde world I'm part of--sound-oriented, free improvisation--is not known for its social vision and political content, and I wouldn't expect it to be otherwise. To be sure, none of the musicians I know and play with have expressed anything but scorn for the current political order, and would probably welcome the kind of massive change that would transform our society away from its current path. But what can we do that our non-musician friends cannot do? In the cultural marketplace our reach is extremely marginal; our music is not reviewed by any but obscure connoisseur journals and e-zines, and our audiences normally number less than a dozen. We can voice our opinion about the war, but we have no cultural authority and would hardly be listened to; to think otherwise is self-flattery substituting for impotence. Moreover, words being the medium of social vision and content, on the rare occasions when we use words at all in our music it is only ironic or garbled, hardly meant to be taken literally. The kind of music we are committed to does not lend itself to political messages, and even if it did we would be preaching to the choir.

We do form a kind of "affinity group" which, like others opposed to the current government recklessness and empire-building, is emboldened by the trust of friendship to act politically in normal ways, such as to participate in demonstrations that might expose us to danger. We can form march bands, as many improvisers recently have done in various locales, that lend a semi-anarchist spirit to the demonstrations, though this does not actually engage the kind of focus we give in performance of our art. In terms of performance, Tom Dill's Mockracy in Oakland (March 2003) is a fine example of an improviser orchestra expressing a political direction through satire, simply through the (non-improvised) structure he organized for the piece. There were no explicit politics involved, and the spectators were just an extension of the players, for the objects of satire are not expected to attend. Like most political work, it was in-house. It was not without political meaning however, for such events deflate the rhetoric of politicians, curing us of lapses when we forget our distrust of them, and they strengthen the community that feels alienated and helpless in the present situation. But free improvisation, the art form, is not the motive force here, it is used in a context that advances a meaning that does not derive directly from it but from the way it is used.

Being artists who speak with sound we have nothing to verbalize in our music, can issue no declarations or insights into war, empire, or even the hierarchical star system, for that matter. But what we do is not irrelevant to the questions of social order. Creative work is so inherent to our lives that we often forget that we have chosen to pursue it not to achieve a respectable social role but because it opens us to new experience, that is, experience that we can find nowhere but through our own search,



our creative work. Anyone with whom we share this experience has made a similar choice; like us they have been engulfed in the commodified, mediated culture and have found it not only trite and boring but inhuman and oppressive. This manipulative culture of entertainment that encircles us poses as the solution to human need, but it is one of the concurrent and contributing problems. What is vital and living and fresh is what we pursue; we are experts in this field, or at least are aimed in that direction. And what is vital to human life and growth tends to challenge the forces in society that feel secure only in a cushioned, conformist atmosphere, who can only speak of tolerating dissent if it is kept at a distance from their own ears. Lost in our tiny cubicle, absorbed in our work, we forget that there is good reason why we are not given more space in this culture. If we were actually heard by society at large our voices would seem to represent anarchy, dysfunction, incomprehensible noise and cacophony. Music is expected to reinforce order and stability, not stand aside and wonder about the nature of order, as we do. Our society might honor the kind of visual art that comes from the same inner sources as ours, but what we do with sound is our voice, and the voice cannot be enclosed in a museum. That is why we are marginal, ghettoized-that is, if we do nothing to counteract this.

The predominant forces in our society do not want it to be renewed by cultural offerings but rather titillated, fed junk, and then rocked to sleep by what the cultural conveyor belt spews forth. Our contemporary simulacrum of democracy has been the marketplace, the invisible hand, which offers people the chance to purchase their own manipulation, and even knowingly welcome it. And of course people have trouble rejecting the mediated experience; it would be painful to many not to cave in to the lyricism and romanticist diversions they are offered, the fantasy arousals that are then symbolically defeated.

Under the banner heralding an expansion of offerings over the past thirty years there has in fact been a restriction, a hardening of the cultural shell; it has been crude and calculating, and we are seeing the results. It is evidenced by the segregation of the avant-garde from the general public, its dismissal as esoteric, which closets it with classicist snobbery. Jazz has been standardized, provided with a museum, and cleansed of its bristly free players, who often spoke with contempt of conformist society and the powers that be. Moreover, in the early sixties popular classical stations even in some rural areas used to regularly include the challenging music of Stockhausen and electronic innovation; such music has been exorcised from all but the most marginal stations and programs. What Susan Sontag once called "the modern public," which expected to have its notions challenged and even upset by a performance, has all but disappeared.

Free improvisation is alienated from cultural rules even further than the rest of the avant-garde, in that it does not require that its practitioners even demonstrate traditional instrumental competence, since it sees such demonstration as problematic, perhaps even detrimental, in the creation of music at the edge of the known. But what most sets this music apart from acceptable culture is that spontaneity is at its core, and as spontaneity is so lacking in our culture it invites participation. And if musicians do not spontaneously break out in song form then the culture that bases its security on repeatable, reinforced experience, and counts on chords being resolved on a sweet note, feels threatened. This is a challenge to the expectations people have in all social life, including politics. Even the politics of the left limits itself in this regard, and manipulates its followers, for people rarely feel that leftist politics could be the realm of spontaneous creative expression.

What is encouraging at present is that there is a new generation of improvisers, people who have apparently come to see this obnoxious, dominant culture of ours as stifling. Improv "scenes" such as never existed before have been cropping up all over north america, something that the old farts like myself might have dreamed of but were too cynical to expect. These new ears have not been created by the diehards, left over from the optimistic era of cultural revolution, but by young people saturated with the most manipulative media exploitation and cultural somnolence. And they are not following the leadership of the older cultural centers like New York; instead they form a network of players and small audiences that have discovered and validated this music for themselves through their own music, not subordinated to others. These are good, creative players, unhindered by the bitterness of those who've seen efforts fail over decades. Perhaps they have hopes of career success, but their music is anything but conformist. More power to them, I say, this is the kind of energy we need, this is liberating for all of us.

At the same time, these young players were raised in the Reagan eighties, in an apolitical atmosphere of individual self-advancement. The following decade wasn't much better in terms of social awareness and political participation. And so I have one word of advice, and I include myself here: if we're going to stick our necks out, let's not limit ourselves to musical choices. Let's not just seek out well-wishers and supporters for an audience, and not count cd sales as personal victories-that is the trap our culture has manufactured to contain dissident culture along with the mainstream. Instead, let's make the effort to play for people we can't imagine would like us. Get out of the improv ghetto and into the unknown, the small towns, libraries, prisons, where we don't know who will show interest, come in the door. Find the world, let the world find us. After all, it is the unknown response

that can awaken us musically in ways beyond our imagination.

As for myself and the content of my music, I must say that I have been deeply affected by the murderous course those fools have put us on. Back in the Vietnam era I had been an activist committed to the revolutionary movement, and so when the trade towers went down I knew the political and military reaction that would come, and felt I'd have to get re-involved in political organizing. I had no desire to do so, and was stunned with a long depression because of the conflict in me. Back in the eighties my politics had been transmuted into music, which expressed much of my rage at the collapse of the possibilities for revolutionary change. But gradually I felt this rage crumble; for various reasons I needed to expand beyond it, and my music with it. I eventually became drawn into the music that has been mis-named "reductionist", and now play a music often quite different from my earlier, wilder impulses on stage. Recently, however, I've been listening to solos from the earlier era, and feeling connected to the explosiveness and intensity of unrestrained passion. I don't agree with the usual notion of an artist's linear development from one style or phase to another, and so I don't feel a conflict in playing sometimes with Dionysian fervor and sometimes with Apollonian restraint.

The question for me and I suspect for other improvisers now is, what effect is all this disgust with the war and the growing empire, and with our fellow citizens' keep-things-normal anxiety going to have on our music. Will our aesthetics wall us off from the world, will our frustration with impotence, our rage, have no impact on what we do on stage?

----May 2003

from the eighties

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3/83 This is Music, it is song that must be listened to, followed, listened into. It is made to be the center of your attention; without that it is an annoying interruption. It is meant to draw from you feeling in all its details. It plays with you, is a conversation with you, so open and frank it will embarrass if you try to separate your ears from how you experience reality... There is a beat here which denies the ridiculous constancy of the clock; it traces movement as it really is, finding its drive within its own needs--it taps the body not the foot.... There is melody as well, identical with its process of creation, using everything as it appears, uncertainty, fear, finding its strength.... There is a delicacy and a passionate hardness, when challenged and stripped bare. It is raw but not harmful, because its rawness is itself

celebration of dance, every sound an exuberance overflowing, basking in its own created luxury....It is, all of it, composed the same moment you hear it, with its birth still smelling as it is handed over. It is all growth, pushing up, running, certainly it's laughing, changing itself over, our child. This tease will ignore the yawning perfection and death of the finished replica, the cynicism of too much marketplace wanting approval before wanting itself....This music encourages your activity and your meditation. It promises to give you what you offer.

What I want is this: a music that is the outer form, the appearance in the world, the reality, of feeling, of desire, need, contradiction. I want a music deep into the present time, how we truly exist now, music which defines us and gives us the future we deserve. I want a music done for the love of playing, which for this reason has to exist, is surrounded by its existence. A music of intense pleasure, polymorphous, naïve, risking itself for its own sake. This music is here for us and won't deceive our hopes if we give everything to it."

--publicity for the lp *Free Life, Singing*, 1983

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### **Where does this music come from?**

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I used to think--when I was just happy to have something so beautiful in my hands--that it came from my Self, the product of my life (and culturally some obscure offshoot of jazz). But when I started playing in public, I abandoned the idea that it was my possession; after all, was I just parading myself in front of others? That was not my motivation. When I was fighting to get the chance to play this strange music for other people, I had to clutch it closely to me for protection. When this period was past, I could let it go, and then saw it as in some way passing through me to others. This sounded good at the time but was a boring dead end; it sanctified my music instead of challenging it and opening it up.

Meanwhile my music continued to evolve, partly through the influence of my friend and sax player Todd Whitman, towards sounds not normally associated with the saxophone. In fact soon all my playing became engulfed in sound. I had earlier resisted sound-oriented music [some of the New York players and composers] as being too cold, a white protestant avantguardism, bizarre for the effect only. But I began to appropriate sound (as opposed to "real" pitch-oriented notes) through sheer sensual pleasure, which had always been the leverage point of my playing and evolving. The real notes are still there, but now in a new environment. I do not separate the sounds of my music from the universe of the sound that my ears are a part of in daily life. I am fed by the sound around me, and when I play an

instrument it reappears partly as accident, that is, I find more in the sounds from the horn than what I intended. It is the perspective of music as sound environment that makes it more visual and concrete, even animalistic, raw. If when the "good tone" appears, dressed up so fine, it offers civilized comments on the melee but can't contain it!

--excerpt from *Linear Notes*, fall 1986

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### **free improvisation as a social act**

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*The following document, written in 1986, reflects conditions that, by the end of the century, had radically changed. It is reprinted in the interest of discovering the roots of current free improvisation. It is not to be assumed that the views here were shared by many other musicians.*

I. 1 uu p84/z nieys ,wifzbt4l \* Is aie wor dswordswordswo rds words word swords grey into black on white, symbols out of gestures, thought (Ha!) grabbed out of electric impulses. waiting for meaning to coalesce, to let it flow past the hazards of the dam, the knife trying to cut water. Open and close, blood that won't reverse in our veins even if we tell it

II. What does spontaneity have to do with this social order, with any social order, with the order of our self-socialized minds. There is not a word we cannot say, and reverse our saying (but not time, as the original mistake.) Our mind moves by regret, shame, erasure, over its landscape. The contingent drifts into gray abstraction as we look towards the Model for guidance.

III. An axiom we know so well that we can't experience it at all: everything is free only at the moment of creation, born free, then repeated, but never re-experienced. The memory of the moment is always a new moment, but it in no way approaches the original because its impetus is tragic, nostalgic, covering up. Attempting to recapture, it is captured by the attempting, it can only seek to perfect, that is, to socialize, improve. The recycled experience cannot strike out with the fault of boldness; it is falsified, stylized boldness that is found in the Art World, that outnumbers and ridicules the original. The copy cannot explore what is unknown because it doesn't know even where to look; it can only follow a map and discover more of what is already known.

IV. Free improvisation is, in its idea of itself, the only music that is not tragic in this way, not searching for the end, not seeking its perfection, not repeated, not corrected. It stands at the center of music because

it is the insecure void between past and future, the void of choice. It puts the immediate human at the center, and that is frightening. It is neither perfect nor purposely imperfect because both of these have the Model at the center. Years ago art criticism snooped its way into the artists' studio behind the finished work, as an elaboration in time of the dead thing in the gallery. Free improvisation goes one step better; it says there is only the working, it is begun and finished at the same moment, it is whatever is actually happening, activity not even proclaiming its nakedness. There could be nothing more ambiguous, and resistant to consistency.

V. In Western cultural history, free improvisation is the rebel child of perfection, born in that world that intertwines so nicely the dream of freedom and the life of slavery. A society's culture is repetition, mimesis, spiraling forward, eating and shedding skins. The solid meaning possible for us, what makes communication easiest and smoothest is created in repetition, and perfectibility through development. This resounds through the culture industry, from creator to consumer and back again through market feedback, passing thru corporation and government agency. Careers are built on perfection of the product and guarantee of reproduction, and they form a synthetic, symbiotic unit with spectators. What artist can withstand the lure of feedback--acceptance, recognition, supportive community? But individuality, the supposed prize of our Western Civilization for which we are asked to suffer, does not integrate us socially, it alienates. So there is a strong tendency for free improv to call a halt to its moment and slice off a piece for consumption, that is, create an identity (language) and insert people into the moment. Improv can then become merely the childhood sandbox of the mature artist. "Improviser" thus becomes a reputation, a harmless label of past (alienating) experience, for those who have "moved beyond" experimentation, a symbol of paid dues. [This was frequently the case in the eighties, in contrast to today; improvisers were lured with the prospect of being upgraded to composer status.]

VI. To the extent that free improv is seen as Art (for some, the broad umbrella of the spiritually homeless), its fate is tied up with conclusions raised about it by Criticism. It must pass through the eye of this needle to be accepted; it must be understood, given its place in the schema of the given before it can be heard and seen. Within the Art-Critical World, things are judged pseudo-historically, a never-ending Hegelian succession of triumphs, each transcending the former. In this schema free improv, by the late eighties, appears as anachronism, an island of earlier freedom which never seemed to find its nostalgia buffs, with its links to the continent of culture now washed away except for a handful of stranded devotees.

## on free improvisation

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Free improvisation, as a conscious form of music, is a relatively recent phenomenon of the last few decades and is still practically unknown. Most people seem to be puzzled by it or have misconceptions, even fear. All other forms of Western art and popular music, including jazz and other structured improvisation, tend towards a conscious identification of the composer or player with the musical choices made. Some structure (song, style, or concept) is decided upon that has an identity set apart from others and given an individual meaning. It is prior to the event and one can judge whether the idea or style has been realized or not after the event. Free improv on the other hand tends to dissolve whatever structure or notions the musicians might bring with them, once the musical moment of choosing, of the actual playing, is entered. The only structure seemingly agreed upon is that all choices are valid. Yet without critical standards this would not be a form of music. Criticism in free improv generally hinges on whether idioms from jazz, rock, western art music, or even one's stylistic habits are being leaned upon.

All standards of "good music" are put in question, including that played moments ago. Our attachment to clichéd formulas, our best ideas stand in the way, and we make efforts to discover and get past them. This is therefore a music constantly open to self-criticism and change, and hugely diverse, as each individual is expected to deal with his and her own evolution. Technical development on the instrument in the traditional sense is no substitute. One could even say it is optional, for some a hindrance, to the extent that it predisposes our judgment as to what we might think is musically valid for oneself.

No improviser can go for long without periods of severe self-doubt, wondering if the entire edifice of past playing has any value at all. This is not a music of self-indulgence, which would be to rest on one's accomplishment and perpetually duplicate one's habits, whatever gets the applause. A kind of musical insecurity is normal for those devoted to this music. A careful and attentive choosing is involved but not as means to an end. Since choice can go any direction outside what is known, this music tends toward an exaggerated full ear-open listening. In fact, since you do not identify with and defend your own sound, you find yourself listening to your very own playing with interest and surprise, reacting to it as you do to others'.

Free improv opens the door to dissolution, and an immersion in sound and silence. We hear a playful voice behind us ever suggesting, "why not this, instead?" Such self-criticism would destroy the music before any sound appeared, if we were involved in compositional pieces. But love of playing is stronger; to play for the sheer joy of it is nowhere stronger than in free improvisation. It is this

that drives the music, this is the energy, not the sense of accomplishment, the creation of a product that meets our standards. All products are going to be lame, at least in retrospect, which is right around the corner. Playing revives us. Ultimately, though we might get lost in resentment, criticism, or the hope for social reward, we always have to come home to the act of playing itself. Here we find a basic acceptance of whatever we do, an ironic humor, an awareness of the vulnerability of the music, and of our ridiculous efforts to create something solid and valid in spite of our commitment to openness. If we were doing this alone or in units (bands), as in the image of western art and popular music, this vulnerability would be impossible to handle. But in fact this music IS the community of its players, one that is now and has been teaching itself how to be aware, to grow, to face disappointment, to ignore the public scorn that all self-conscious artistic communities have faced. In the end, we have nothing to go on except each other. And there's nothing sad or self-pitying about that.

This music reflects our disillusionment with the fundamental impulse of other modern, Western musics to organize nature, as represented in sound. We have a different way of dealing with so-called "chaos"; it is not our enemy, not even a matter to be fashioned into durable, self-validating human objects. We are "at play" with sound. Since our view is so dissident from normal assumptions, free improv cannot be expected to advance its players in the so-called music world of career and conquest. Try as we might! There are few of us who are acceptable in jazz clubs, few who have not cleared out coffee houses, to the consternation of the owners. The prejudice of our culture is towards structure--give us something, a token of structure, a name for the piece--that is what will validate the musician. The free players who have wide recognition outside the improv community are those who also play structured music, which is of course just fine, but it does instruct us about the preferences of our culture. We don't have any "best players" to offer, any more than a "best music". The improv that is classic has already been consumed by the present community of players; what is fresh is in process, and ready to be heard!

---liner notes to the cd *Thaw*, 1992, revised, 2001

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